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Chapter 6: Public and community transport

Charles Musselwhite

Centre for Innovative Ageing, Swansea University

Abstract

Bus use in later life tends to increase, especially in countries where there is cheaper or free travel on buses for older people. That said, there are still many barriers to bus use. The most major barrier for older people is feeling unsafe on the bus, especially at night. Accessibility issues are also important, with concerns for step-free access and getting a seat. A bus driver driving off before the older person has sat down is another major concern for older people. The presence of a friendly helpful, understanding bus driver is seen as a huge benefit for older people. Training to support bus drivers in providing an age friendly service are therefore highly recommended. In many countries, public transport is supplemented by as community transport offering, a door- to door on demand facility to help older people stay mobile where there is a lack of accessible public buses. There are real advantages for older people using such buses, especially creating a safe environment taking older people to important places, such as hospitals or shops. Such services can be supplemented by journeys for days out and these are very popular with users. Older people aren't large users of railway services. Barriers include concerns over getting a seat, worry about what happens if connections are missed and services are disrupted. Older people are more likely to want staff to help them complete their journey and emphasise the need for seats, cleanliness and facilities over journey length and cost.

Keywords: perceptions, mobility, health, wellbeing, safety, accessibility

Running header: public and community transport

1. Introduction

This chapter highlights the importance of social, infrastructure and vehicle barriers faced by older people using public and community transport, examining public bus services, community transport and also railway services.

2. Public buses

Public buses play an important part in connectivity of older people, especially those who have given up driving. Bus use is especially high among older people where there is concessionary or free fares, as in the United Kingdom, for older people. Not only does the bus keep people connected, bus use is also correlated to health and wellbeing, being a protective factor in obesity for older people (Webb et al., 2011). A report from KPMG suggested that every £1 spent on subsidising travel for older people, returned around £2.87 to the economy in terms of increased access to shops, services, activities and enabling support for others (Greener Travel, 2014).

2.1. Barriers to using the bus

There are still many barriers to using a bus even if it is free that prohibit or make it difficult for older people to use it. Gilhooly et al. (2002) found the highest barrier to public transport use amongst older people was personal security in the evening and at night (79.8% of over 70s agreed), followed by transport running late and having to wait (see Table 1). A report using accompanied journeys in London has highlighted similar problems for older people including crowds at the bus stop or on the bus, prams taking up the seats or area at the front of the bus, steps up to the bus being too high (or driver stopping too far from the kerb) and fear of falling over when the bus moves off (TfL, 2009). Broome et al. (2010) in an Australian study found that for older people, driver friendliness, ease of entry/exit and information usability were prioritised barriers and facilitators for older people. Age UK London (2011) quantified this by surveying bus driving behaviour in 550 journeys in inner London and 541 journeys in outer London. In 42% of cases, passengers were not given enough time to sit down before the bus was driven away from the stop. In 25% of the cases the bus did not pull up tight to the kerb at the bus stop.

Problem	% aged 70 or over who state it is a problem
Personal security at night and in evening	79.8
Public transport running late	68.3
Having to wait	68.0
Difficulty carrying heavy load	66.3

Possibility of cancellations	66.0
Behaviour of some other passengers	63.5
Lack of cleanliness	53.8
Having to be out in bad weather	53.8
Having to change transport	53.3
Diffculty in travelling where I want to	50.0
Difficulty in travelling when I want to	48.1

Table 1: Ten most frequent barriers for respondents aged over 70 years, with the proportion of that age-group who reported each as a ‘problem’ (after Gilhooly, et al. 2002)

2.2. *Public transport norms*

One of the major barriers associated with using public transport, such as buses, is the anxiety over the norms of use. It may be, for example, that the user hasn’t used a bus in years. Formal information provision on buses has improved immensely over the past few years, more information than ever before is presented on timetables including real-time and en-route bus stop information. However, older people are anxious about the norms, for example the normal departure time (is it sooner than is advertised), what times of day are less busy, is there seat availability, are buses accessible, how much can be carried? (see table 2 for further examples).

Formal information
Timetable information
Bus stop locations
Pedestrian area
Real time information
Informal information

Does the bus actually leave to the timetable?

Ease of carrying and storing items on the bus

Crowding and ease of getting a seat

State of the pavements near the bus stop

Provision of amenities in the local area near to the bus stop

Passenger perceptions of safety

Bus driver attitude

Table 2: Travel anxieties when using a bus reported by older people who don't often use one (adapted from Musselwhite, 2011; Musselwhite and Haddad, 2010, 2008).

One element that stands out time and time again is staff attitudes, for example the bus driver can make or break an older person's journey. A sympathetic driver attuned to older people's needs, who waits for the passenger to sit down before driving off is invaluable. So too is a "cheery" driver who passes the time of day with the older person. Many bus companies have begun to train bus drivers to be sympathetic to the needs of older people in this respect. Older people also want a driver to be friendly, knowledgeable and helpful, to provide information if needed and to be chatty; older people liked to get to know drivers they saw regularly. It is similar on trains where station and train staff attitude is crucial to successful journeys and the support needs to include practical help with luggage, direction and train times but also extend to staff having a positive attitude to performing such duties.

2.3. Improving bus services

Broome et al (2013) looked at how to improve services and overcome barriers for older people using buses in Queensland, Australia, using Brisbane as a control. Seven priorities were implemented:-

1. Accessibility, for example low floor buses to make boarding and alighting easier
2. Age friendly training for bus drivers (see also Broome 2010). This is also being rolled out across all 24,500 bus drivers in London by 2016 (see TfL, 2009).
3. Frequent buses and a call for evening and weekend services in particular.
4. Bus stops close to homes and destinations. Broome et al (2013) suggest a system should aim to stop within 200m of residences and destinations. Bus stops need to be of good quality too; they should provide shelter and aid boarding and alighting.

5. Accessible pedestrian infrastructure is important, footpaths and pedestrian crossing are part of the journey too.

6. Providing training and information for older people about how to use buses. To help older people use public transport and get used to the norms, travel training or buddying are sometimes provided. Reflective group work would be beneficial where older people discuss giving up driving perhaps alongside others who have recently given up driving. The group could provide both emotional and practical support. Practical support could include the ability to share lifts in taxis and travel together on buses and to get together for discretionary travel for days out as a group (Musselwhite, 2010). Membership could be continuous rather than a programme or cycle of support as is found in an Australian support group (see Liddle *et al.*, 2008, 2006, 2004). Travel buddying could accompany such a group where people new to a mode of transport are accompanied by an expert user. , This can be popular for some and again can help overcome the anxiety of travelling alone and gain valuable understanding of the social norms.

7. Bus systems need to provide access to destinations of interest to older people themselves and Broome *et al.* (2013) propose that older people should be more involved in design of routes

3. Community transport

The provision of specialist services door to door for people who cannot access public or private transport occurs through community based transit, known as specialist transport services or community transport. The provision of such services varies hugely throughout the world, though it is usually provided through a charity or third sector organisation. It tends to not run to specific timetables, though also is not always based on demand.

3.1. Advantages of community transport

Community transport reduces isolation and loneliness through providing access to social opportunities, chances for leaving the house, chances to socialise with other passengers and the driver (ECT Charity, 2016). Community transport improves people's health through access to GP and hospital services and reduces missed appointments, improved diagnosis and therefore lower healthcare costs (KPMG, 2016). It can also mean people are discharged earlier as they have access between hospital appointments and home (ECT Charity, 2016). Drivers, not only provide social support to passengers, but can also help identify early warning signs of illness or of loneliness and isolation (ECT Charity, 2016).

3.2. Barriers to using community transport

Fragmented services: Some countries, regions and areas have better provision than others, so depending upon where older people live can make a difference to accessibility to such transport.

On demand: Services are usually based around a loose timetable set by the provider, that alters depending on who is using the service. On-demand based community transport, comparable to taxi or private car use, is still quite rare.

Poor quality transport: The use of poor quality transport is still too often seen. Poor quality mini buses not designed with older people's use in mind mean difficulty boarding and alighting and poor comfort.

Social norms: People view community transport as not being for people like them, even when they could benefit from it. Perceptions of community transport lie (Musselwhite, 2017)

Feedback: Customer feedback is limited as users are afraid of losing a vital service, therefore people often do not report negative issues with the service (Musselwhite, 2017).

Utilitarian service: Journeys typically are based around providing transport to shops, services and doctors and hospitals, but there needs to be more "discretionary" journeys provided to places of leisure and fun (Musselwhite, 2017).

4. Age Friendly Rail travel

Over the past decade the amount of people using rail has grown significantly in the United Kingdom (UK), both absolutely and in terms of percentage of overall distance travelled. In the United Kingdom, rail travel has increased 67% between 1995/97 and 2013 (DfT, 2014). The increase is especially noticeable in early and middle aged adults and is not anywhere near as pronounced in later life, indeed those aged over 70 years of age have stayed around similar levels, fluctuating between 130 and 200 miles (except a peak of 269 miles in 2010) per person per year, accounting for between 4 and 6% of miles travelled. Figure 1 shows the recent trends in miles travelled by rail for the over 70s, with a peak in 2012 of over 260 miles and a trough of below 150 in 2007. There is little explanation for these peaks and troughs. Across the lifecourse, train usage begins to fall from 60 years onwards (DfT, 2014), some of which is linked to decreasing travel as commuters or for work purposes (DfT 2014).

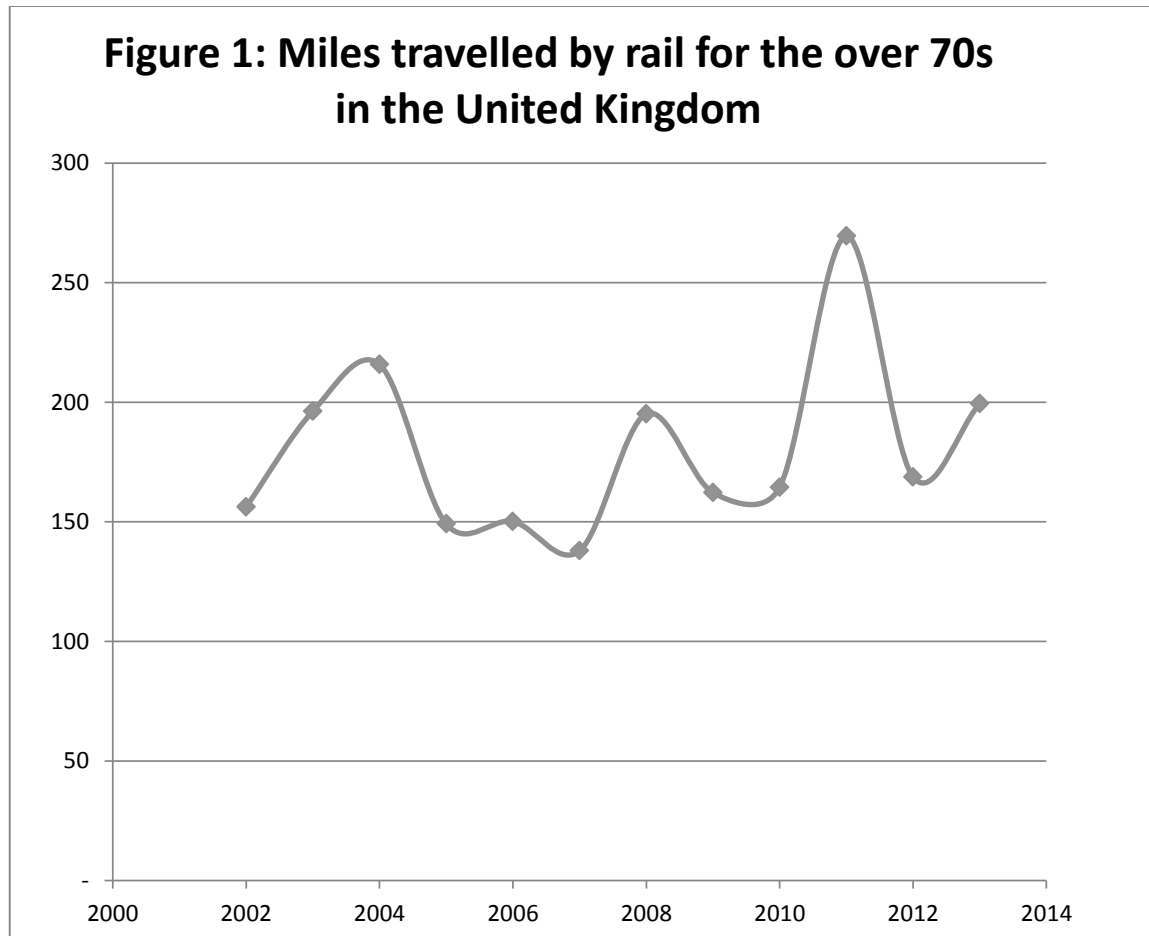


Figure 1: Miles travelled by rail for the over 70s in the United Kingdom (after DfT, 2014)

4.1. Older people's satisfaction of railways

Older people have higher satisfaction with their train travel including being positive about price and the overall journey experience. This maybe because of making more recreational journeys than the average train user – leisure users are more satisfied than those using it for work and commuters

across all ages, for example (Ormerod et al., 2015). Searching through passenger data from Passenger Focus (2015) reveals the following:

- Getting a seat on a train is a higher priority for older passengers than it is for younger passengers and from 60 years onwards it becomes more important than cost of the ticket.
- Older rail passengers are more likely than rail passengers in general to want to be kept informed about the journey and any delays (Passenger Focus, 2015) and
- Older rail passengers compared to younger and middle age rail passengers, are less likely to be concerned about free wi-fi being available.
- There is more concern with the state and cleanliness of the carriage and of the toilet facilities from 65 years onwards (Passenger Focus, 2015).

- Passengers aged over 60 prioritise these over length of journey and frequency of services, possibly showing their more intermittent and leisure use.

Station design is also of vital for older people. For those with mobility impairments or want a little help going upstairs with heavy luggage, we have seen lifts being put in now on most principal stations, but little consideration has been made as to the location of the lifts which are often at one end of the platform requiring much walking to and from them to get the train which often stops in the middle! Stations naturally must have indoor waiting areas and toilets wherever possible. Older people can feel more vulnerable on trains and station and visibility is key to this; older people feel more vulnerable and are less likely to use the station where there is a lack of staff, lack of other passengers, lack of lighting and dark enclosed waiting areas (Cozens et al., 2004). This can be placated somewhat through better design. An excellent project was carried out on the valley lines in Wales which resulted in better designed stations. In particular, Dingle Road was re-designed from a station that contained two old enclosed shelters to one that contained a see-through shelter which improved feelings of safety for all age groups (Cozens et al., 2004). Consideration of platform barriers in and out of the station must weigh up pros and cons of accessibility, allowing family, friends, carers and helpers to carry luggage and help on and off the train without the need for a ticket and without the need for older people to make mistakes with the barrier system, causing anxiety and stress.

Ticketing is complex in the UK for all everyone, let alone people either (1) not used to using the railway and not using it regularly, as many older people fit this category as they are less likely to be using the rail regularly for work, for example; (2) who suffer some cognitive challenge, which again many begin to acquire as we get older. Making tickets more straightforward and legible is needed, both in terms of who can use the ticket when and where (the validity of the tickets allowed on which services is highly complex) but also on the ticket printed out itself. Allowing a single ticket or card to move between different modes of transport, say between bus and train and certainly between buses is needed. The Oyster card in London is a great example of this.

Older people more than other groups value the importance of staff to help them at rail stations and on train services. They are more likely to trust information if it is given from authority figures, for example railway staff, and like the staff to be friendly and approachable (Musselwhite, 2011). They use staff for timetable information, especially if trains get delayed or things go wrong, whereas other groups are more likely now to use mobile ICT and apps (Musselwhite, 2011). They use staff for backing up information they see on screens or hear over the announcements which they trust less than younger groups. They also often want staff available should they need help carrying cases.

4.2. Towards an age friendly railway service

So, overall an age friendly railway service must have the following:

- (1) Railways must be accessibility. The railways station and train must be accessible, especially help with mobility but also in terms of facilities, and crucially, seating and toilets. If services are likely to be full or a seat cannot be booked in advance or a train does not have toilet facilities, older people need to be made aware of this and be given opportunities to alter or change travel at no additional cost.
- (2) Railways must have integrated and simple ticketing. Clear ticket labelling and pricing and the possibility of integrated Oyster Card style ticketing be investigated. Concessionary or free fares would really benefit older passengers and should be considered.
- (3) Railways must have available helpful and friendly staff. Having staff that are trained to deal with issues that older people might face, that have the time and patience to deal with enquiries and concerns are crucial. Staff must be on hand to be able to help escort passengers and their luggage to their seats without much hassle and without making older people feel a burden. Staff training should emphasise an age friendly approach, as has been undertaken by many bus companies, for example. If no staff are to be available, again older people need to be alerted and opportunities to make alternative travel, at no extra cost, be offered.
- (4) Railways must be safe. The railway station and train itself must feel safe to use. Presence of staff can aid this, but also design is crucial with visibility being the key. Where staff are present they must be visible and approachable for the passengers.
- (5) Railways must provide an attractive service. The railway service should be clean and presented in an attractive manner.
- (6) Railways must provide an intuitive, information based system. Clearly labelled exits and entrances placed on stations. Clear instructions on services with updated information on delays and changes to the service are needed at all times. Information often needs verifying by staff members and this should be done as a matter of course not only when something goes awry.

5. Conclusions

Across all forms of public and community transport three elements become vitally clear that are important to older people's use. First, social norms are important. In many cases older people are using such transport for the first time in many years, in some cases for the first time ever. There are many misunderstandings and anxieties over key issues of the transport provision that are enough to stop people using it. Hence, the need for an information campaign, buddying or support groups are crucial. Secondly, the presence and attitude of staff members are vital. This improves trust, security and reduces anxiety. There is a therefore a real need to maintain a presence of well trained members of staff to enable older people to use public and community transport. Finally, there is a need to improve the offering of transport itself. The service must be comfortable and have space to sit, be clean and accessible. These elements are usually championed over reduced journey time and can even

be on a par with cost of the service for older people. This is potentially quite different to everyday public transport users, who may be commuting or using the service for work and need a quick journey over comfort and cost. Providers of services need to understand these important distinctions and plan services accordingly.

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